

INCOME MAINTENANCE NEWS

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Wisconsin Plans to Extend Broad-Based Categorical Eligibility for Food Stamps

Jayne Wanless, Food Stamp Policy Analyst

This summer, Wisconsin is extending categorical eligibility to most food stamp households.

Federal regulations allow categorical eligibility to apply to anyone who is authorized to receive a service funded by Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Wisconsin is joining eight other states that have expanded their categorical eligibility by informing food stamp applicants of an available TANF-funded service.

Wisconsin households are categorically eligible if they receive Wisconsin Works (W-2), Tribal TANF, Child Care Assistance, Caretaker Supplement,

Kinship Care and a few other TANF-funded services. JobNet is partially funded by TANF. Adding JobNet information to food stamp approval and change notices will extend categorical eligibility standards to virtually all food stamp households.

CARES will automatically apply categorical eligibility to the correct households. This will eliminate asset errors because asset information will no longer be used to determine eligibility. It will also ease eligibility standards for food stamp households, and reduce workload because workers will no longer have to gather asset information.

The following language will be added to food stamp notices to inform food stamp households of the policy change:

"Wisconsin JobNet is available to you. JobNet is the single largest source of job openings in Wisconsin. You can access JobNet via the Internet at <http://www.dwd.state.wi.us/jobnet/mapWI.htm> or on touch screen monitors at your local Job Center. To locate the Job Center nearest you call 1-888-258-9966."

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Hmong Refugees Seek Opportunity in Wisconsin

Phoua Her, CARES Information and Problem Resolution Center

Wisconsin will welcome approximately 3,000 to 3,600 Hmong refugees between July and December as a result of a State Department decision to admit approximately 15,000 Lao-Hmong refugees to the U.S. The refugees will come from among the nearly 15,500 Lao-Hmong refugees living on the grounds of a Buddhist Temple (Wat) compound in Thailand. They are remnants of the thousands who fled in the aftermath of the Viet Nam war. The refugees will be admitted under Alien Status Code 04-Refugees Lawfully Present, Section 207.

The age distribution of the Hmong refugee population is:

Age 0-3	3,040	20%
Age 4-18	6,129	40%
Age 19-44	4,200	27%
Age 45-64	1,320	8%
Above 64	587	5%

It is likely that the majority of these refugee families will be eligible for Wisconsin Works (W-2) placement, food stamp benefits, and family Medicaid. Single individuals or childless couples may be eligible for Refugee Cash Assistance and Refugee Medical Assistance in the first eight months after arrival (see the W-2 manual, Chapter 20).

As the new refugees come to Wisconsin, schools, health providers, Job Centers and Department programs in 13 communities in particular (see chart on next page) will be impacted. Additional detailed information on the Hmong refugee population is available at www.co.ramsey.mn.us.

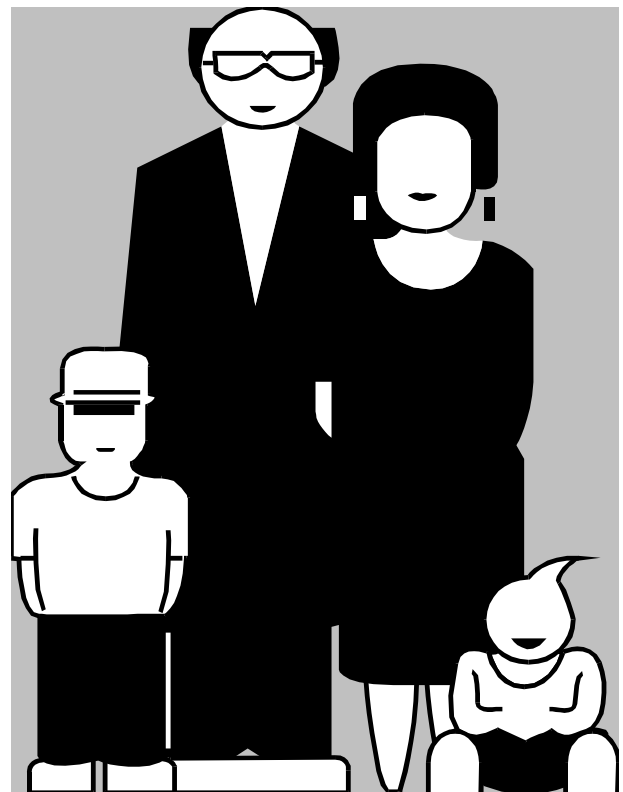
Governor Jim Doyle has appointed a Special Advisory Hmong Resettlement Task Force which he has charged with making recommendations on system improvements, best practices, employment connections, housing, citizenship, and access to needed services to successfully integrate this new refugee population into our state.

In addition, The Departments of Workforce Development and Health and Family Services have formed a workgroup for the implementation tasks related to planning and communicating with the local Income Maintenance and W-2 agencies and Job Center partners.

The DWD/DHFS workgroup will provide information to local agencies, clarify roles and responsibilities, and foster effective partnerships between public and private agencies to enable refugees to assimilate quickly.

A top priority has been to develop and issue an Operations Memo and Program Manual updates. This information will help local agencies, some of which have not worked with new refugees for several years, assist with relocation, fully utilize community resources for refugees, and facilitate employment. The Operations Memo was distributed in July.

The chart on the next page provides information about where these refugees plan to reside in Wisconsin.



Hmong Refugees Seek Opportunity in Wisconsin, cont.

Number of Persons in Thailand Who Have Had Interest Forms Filed by Wisconsin Relatives (updated 6/1/04).

WI City (County) Where Relatives Live	Agency Filed (Contact Person)	No. of Cases (in Thailand)	No. of Persons (in Thailand)
Green Bay (Brown)	Catholic Charities (Barb)	37	234
Wrightstown (Brown)	" = "	1	6
Little Chute (Outagamie)	" = "	1	7
Appleton (Outagamie)	" = "	24	175
Menasha (Winnebago)	" = "	5	30
Neenah (Winnebago)	" = "	2	9
Seymour (Outagamie)	" = "	1	14
Oshkosh (Winnebago)	" = "	11	61
Two Rivers (Manitowoc)	" = "	3	19
Manitowoc	" = "	23	141
Kaukauna	" = "	1	14
Grand Chute	" = "	1	11
Milwaukee	LSS (Susan)	17	103
Milwaukee	IIW (Al/Chuevang)	127	890
Milwaukee	Catholic Charities (Rosine)	30	171
Sheboygan	IIW (Al/Chuevang)	12	75
Sheboygan	Catholic Charities (Rosine)	19	98
Madison (Dane)	Catholic Charities (Mary)	30	183
La Crosse	Catholic Charities (Dan)	36	278
Eau Claire	Catholic Charities (Dan)	14	103
Menomonie (Dunn)	Catholic Charities (Dan)	11	70
Mauston (Juneau)	Catholic Charities (Dan)	1	5
Wausau (Marathon)	LSS (Susan)	75	448
Stevens Point (Portage)	LSS (Susan)	16	57
Wisconsin Rapids (Wood)	LSS (Susan)	13	84
Plover (Portage)	LSS (Susan)	4	24
Total		515	3,310

†Data provided by the State of Wisconsin, Bureau of Migrant, Refugee and Labor Services. For more information contact Ying Lee, Bureau of Migrant, Refugee and Labor Services (Phone: 608-267-7275, e-mail: ying.lee@dwd.state.wi.us).

Outreach Initiatives

Stacia Jankowski, Policy Analyst

A major Food Stamp Program goal in 2004 is to increase the participation rate of eligible persons to at least 80%.

While many individuals make informed decisions to not participate, other factors can present obstacles to program access and participation. Focus groups, conducted in 2001 cited the following as the most prevalent reasons for non-participation:

1. Misinformation about eligibility requirements, and
2. Insufficient knowledge of the program.

To provide information and dispel myths, we have developed a training curriculum, known as Food Stamps 101, for community-based organizations on the Food Stamp Program. In summer 2003, staff at food pantries and shelters, including homeless and domestic abuse shelters, were targeted for training with topics that included:

- Referring qualified individuals for an eligibility determination,
- The application process and priority services,
- Non-financial and financial eligibility requirement information,
- Verification information required for application,
- Cooperating with program requirements,



- Eligibility requirements for continuing to receive food stamp benefits,
- Special circumstances, and
- Available resources.

Food Stamps 101 training continues as a collaborative effort of DHFS/DHCF/BHCE, the DWD/DWS/BPS Training Section, and the University of Oshkosh CCDET. We will tailor the basic core presentations for the needs of interested community based organizations. Please have interested organizations contact Stacia Jankowski by phone at (608) 267-3384, or by e-mail at JankoSL@dhfs.state.wi.us for training information.

Electronic Case File Phase II Pilot Project Scheduled to Begin in September

Michelle Pauser, CARES Information and Problem Resolution Center

A pilot of Phase II of the Electronic Case File (ECF) project is scheduled to begin in September 2004, with a statewide rollout beginning later this fall.

Phase I of the ECF project provided online access to the Employment Verification and Insurance Verification forms. In Phase II, documents will be electronically scanned into the system, and organized into logical subfolders for each case.

With the conversion to electronic documents, workers will be able to access and scan an entire case folder, or locate a specific document within a folder and view it on their screen. The conversion will also:

- Permit workers, supervisors, and other authorized individuals to simultaneously access documents,
- Reduce the need for paper storage, and
- Provide electronic storage for management of case files.

Phase II is designed to allow the complete conversion of the paper case file to an electronic version. Three counties are targeted as pilot offices, and different models of the ECF are being developed to accommodate the unique business needs of agencies of various sizes.

Governor Doyle Announces KidsFirst Initiative

Jeff Esterholm, Trainer

During Governor Jim Doyle's January 2004 State of the State speech, he urged legislators "to get back to the issues that really matter to our future—strengthening health care, creating jobs and investing in kids." The Governor followed up on his charge in the first week of May by laying out his comprehensive **KidsFirst** initiative.

KidsFirst is a wide-ranging effort to ensure that the children of Wisconsin have the opportunity to achieve their potential. The Departments of Health and Family Services, Public Instruction, Workforce Development, and Corrections anticipate playing a large role in this initiative for children and their families with a focus on four key areas.

Healthy Kids is one area of KidsFirst that may have significant implications for Income Maintenance programs. Healthy Kids Initiatives include:

- **Food Stamp Initiatives.** Making tools available to individuals and eligibility workers via the Internet; enhancement of outreach efforts to eligible, under-served families; improved accessibility of food stamp application materials in Spanish, Hmong, and Russian; and implementation of a mobile service or "eligibility van" program that will travel throughout Milwaukee to sign up eligible individuals for food stamps and Medicaid at community locations such as food pantries, health clinics, grocery stores, and schools.
- **Health Care Initiatives.** Grant-enhanced efforts to identify and enroll Hispanic and Hmong populations and low income families who are eligible for Medicaid.
- **Oral Health Initiatives.** Allow Medicaid reimbursements to pay for fluoride varnish treatments for Medicaid-covered children; certification of dental hygienists as eligible Medicaid providers; and providing funding to technical colleges to provide dental care for low-income and uninsured children.

- **Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiatives.** Protecting and supporting the Family Planning Waiver Program that covers women 15 years of age to under 45 years.
- **Healthy Start Initiatives.** Modifying Wisconsin's Children's Health Insurance Program to include prenatal care coverage to undocumented immigrants with the first notice of pregnancy.

Healthy Kids also includes initiatives covering immunizations, school breakfast, fitness and nutrition, anti-smoking, lead poisoning, and childhood mental health. KidsFirst includes three other components as well:

The **Ready for Success** component includes improvement of child-care options available to parents and rewarding high quality child care programs. Ready for Success also calls for investing in a high quality early childhood development workforce, expanding access in Wisconsin to four-year-old kindergarten, and the promotion of literacy.

Safe Kids has as its focus on the recruitment and support of quality foster care and adoptive homes, along with improved child welfare services, and a reduction in family violence. Safe Kids will also work to ensure safe routes to school and promote child transportation safety.

KidsFirst's **Strong Families** will initiate a universal home visit program for new parents and connect families to available support services. Strong Families also focuses on an improved child support system and a break in the cycle of incarceration.

More information on Governor Doyle's KidsFirst Initiative – Ready for Success, Safe Kids, Strong Families, and Healthy Kids – can be found online at: www.wisgov.state.wi.us/docs/kidsfirst.pdf.



TRAINING NEWS UPDATES

WislineWeb Training Updates

Dave Turk and Staci Wanty, Trainers

Partner Training Services (PTS) presented informational sessions in February and May 2004 for local agency staff with training responsibilities. These sessions utilized a web-based conference service called Wisline Web (WLW).

Wisline Web is a conferencing and virtual classroom technology that enables PTS staff to interact with a statewide audience. Participants listened to, and interacted with, PTS staff through the teleconference line as a variety of content was transmitted over the Internet and displayed on their computer screens.

The presentations provided information about new distance learning initiatives released by the PTS staff. In February, Reduced Change Reporting Phase IIA and Transitional Food Stamps were discussed. The May sessions addressed Employer Verification Processing and Reduced Change Reporting Phase IIB. Other topics included accessing courses in PTS Learning Center, components of the new courses, and updates on Income Maintenance (IM) training initiatives.

The PTS staff allotted time for local agency staff to ask questions at all the sessions. An evaluation at the end of each session allowed local agency staff to provide valuable feedback. Participants have found the update sessions valuable for preparing local staff to assist in training.

Since the intent is to provide information on training opportunities, PTS staff attempts to schedule these events in conjunction with the release of training materials. Training materials are often related to an Operations Memo and cannot be released until the policy is finalized, and the Operations Memo is published. Policy is outlined in the Operations Memo and reinforced by distance courses.

The sessions held so far have not focused on policy, and were not intended as policy training. The Wisline Web training update highlights courses and materials that PTS has available to support learning the policy in the Operations Memo.

PTS anticipates future training updates to address new initiatives like the CARES Worker Web. Those who have participated in the update sessions have found it valuable in preparing to assist local staff in training. PTS staff appreciates the opportunity to communicate directly with local agencies. If you are a supervisor or local agency trainer and have not participated in the previous sessions, PTS encourages you to take part in one the next time they are offered.

For more information about Wisline Web, check out the UW Extension's Wisline Web information page at <http://www.uwex.edu/ics/wlweb/index.html>. If you have questions, contact Theresa Fosbinder, DHFS IM Training Coordinator at: fosbitl@dhfs.state.wi.us.



PTS staff members pictured from front to back: Eric Gibson, Tech Support for WLW sessions; Staci Wanty, Co-Presenter for WLW sessions; Theresa Fosbinder, DHFS IM Training Coordinator; Dave Turk, Co-Presenter for WLW sessions.

CARES Worker Web Implementation: Communication and Training

Theresa Fosbinder, DHFS IM Training Coordinator

The CARES Worker Web (CWW) will be piloted prior to implementation. Implementation planning has begun this summer:

- The CWW end-user feedback site was launched on June 7. The end-user feedback site will not only provide interested staff with information about CWW, but will also provide for user input and feedback on the new design and features. Access the CWW end-user feedback web site at <http://caresfeedback.wisconsin.gov/home/>.
- Presentations on CWW were offered at the Information Technology (IT) conference June 9, and at the 67th annual Wisconsin Social Services Association (WSSA) Conference and Training Institute on June 17. These sessions provided project status information, and also allowed for a dialogue with questions and answers about CWW.
- In late June and early July, presenters will attend each of the regional meetings and provide project status updates, and discuss implementation plans and details of the end-user feedback web site, communication, and training plans.
- In July, the Income Maintenance Advisory Committee (IMAC), Training and Technical Assistance subcommittee, and other subcommittees will provide input to Partner Training Services (PTS) about the CWW training approach. It is anticipated that the model for conducting CWW training will consist of a "blended" approach that includes some distance components, opportunities for classroom interaction, and technical assistance/on-site support.

For more information about CWW implementation, attend a regional meeting this summer, access the PTS Training or IMAC web sites, or continue to read the Income Maintenance Newsletter.

Some Useful Web Sites:

The Income Maintenance News: <http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov/em/imnews/index.htm>

MA Handbook: <http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov/em/mahandbook/index.htm>

CARES Updates: <http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov/em/cares-updates/index.htm>

Eligibility Management; <http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov/em/index.htm>

DHFS: <http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov/>

Policy Notification: <http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov/em/policy-notification/signup.htm>

Income Maintenance Advisory Committee: <http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov/em/imac/>



PAM's Food Stamp ChitChat Corner

John Haine, DHFS Food Stamp Payment Accuracy Manager (PAM)

Hello fellow Food Stamp Program workers. I'm the new DHFS Payment Accuracy Manager (P.A.M.) and I'd like to take this opportunity to talk with you about the Food Stamp Program in general, and more particularly about food stamp payment accuracy.

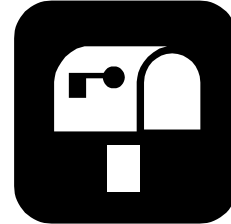
In this column I will provide advice and answers to the many burning questions I know you have regarding food stamp payment accuracy. We'll look at the most current food stamp error-related information: trends, graphs, charts, corrective action projects, etc. You name it; we'll discuss it.

Today's topic: What's happening with our payment error rate for 2004?

Wisconsin's error rate continues to fall. The most recent data we have puts us at about 7.5%. This is almost a 2% drop from our 2003 rate of 9.3%. Our goal for 2004 is 6% and I think we'll make it.

Our final 2003 rate is 9.32%, which is a 3.37% reduction from 2002. That's a 26% reduction, and it's due to local agency hard work. Bravo!

PAM's E-mail Bag



PAM looks forward to hearing from you with your questions and comments. Please send your questions and comments to PAM's E-mail Bag c/o Editor, Income Maintenance Newsletter, Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services, Division of Health Care Financing, P.O. Box 53701-0309, Madison, WI 53701-0309, or at bartejm@dhfs.state.wi.us.

Income Maintenance programs include: Food Stamps, Medicaid (including BadgerCare, SeniorCare, and FamilyCare), SSI Caretaker Supplement, and Funeral and Cemetery Aids.

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